

Research-project:

Music Therapy and Dementia

The role of musical improvisation in the occurrence of essential moments of meeting in music therapy with people in a severe stage of dementia

Anke Coomans¹, Jos de Backer¹, Hanne Mette Ridder²
(1 Leuven, Belgium, 2 Aalborg, Denmark)

Introduction

This poster presents an ongoing doctoral study within the domain of music therapy and dementia.

Objectives: People in late stage dementia often show signs of anxiety and distress. Due to cognitive impairments they lack the ability to express their emotions and needs in a way that is understandable for their family and/or caregivers. The aim of this study is to explore how musical improvisation in music therapy with this population can lead to occurrences of essential moments of meeting on a non-verbal, musical level.

Method: In a multiple case study (n=4), data consisted of written clinical notes of the music therapist and video-recordings of individual music therapy sessions. Each case study comprised an in-depth analysis that led to a selection of essential moments of meeting between the patient and therapist. The selection as well as the analysis happened by means of a research intervision group and was based on an interpretive phenomenological approach.

Preliminary results: The preliminary outcome of the case studies shows how musical improvisation is used as a specific intervention and how certain musical elements, such as timbre, tempo, silence, and phrasing, play a crucial role in the occurrence of what is defined as ‘essential moments of meeting’.

Preliminary conclusion: Musical improvisation with persons in severe stages of dementia may lead to ‘essential moments of meeting’. The study provides relevant insights into musical improvisation and its elements, clinical music therapeutic skills, and meaningful interactions through music in late stage dementia.

Research Questions

What is the role of musical improvisation in the occurrence of essential moments of meeting in music therapy with people in a severe stage of dementia?

Subquestions:

- What defines essential moments of meeting within a music therapy context with people in a severe stage of dementia?
- What defines the characteristics of musical improvisation in a music therapy context that contribute to the occurrence of essential moments of meeting with people in a severe stage of dementia?
- What specific music therapeutic interventions contribute to the occurrence of essential moments of meeting in music therapy with people in a severe stage of dementia?

Tranen bij Martha...
Niet in woorden te vatten,
muziek weerklinkt.

Eén stem,
muziek van beiden.
Verdriet,
Zo puur, zo echt

(impression of a moment of meeting in Music Therapy*)

* Translation:
Martha's tears, words don't matter, Music sounds. One voice, music of both. Sadness, pure, real.



Method

FOCUS		DATA NUMBER	DATA SOURCE	GATHERED DATA
DATA-COLLECTION				
STEP 1	Assessment-phase	data 1a	music therapist (researcher)	written impressions, assessment of inclusion criteria
		data 1b	multidisciplinary team	assessment
STEP 2	Music therapy treatment	data 2a	music therapist (researcher)	clinical notes
		data 2b	music therapist (researcher)	video-recordings
DATA-ANALYSIS				
STEP 3	Selection of the core sessions	data 3	clinical supervisor	observations > descriptions/categories > selection of the core sessions
STEP 4	Selection of the core fragments	data 4a/4b	psychotherapist, external music therapist	separate observations > descriptions/categories > collection of the core fragments
STEP 5	Analysis of the core fragments	data 5	clinical supervisor, external music therapist, psychotherapist, music therapist (researcher)	thorough group-observations > descriptions/categories > reflections/interpretations
STEP 6	Musical analysis / synthesis	data 6	music therapist (researcher)	comprehensive musical scores and analyses
STEP 7	Conclusion of the data analysis			> definition/description of core phenomena (eg concept of 'resonance') > comparison between subjects > basis for further research

Table 1: research-methodology in 7 steps

Data-analysis occurs by means of categories. These categories are divided into four different domains as showed in figure 1.

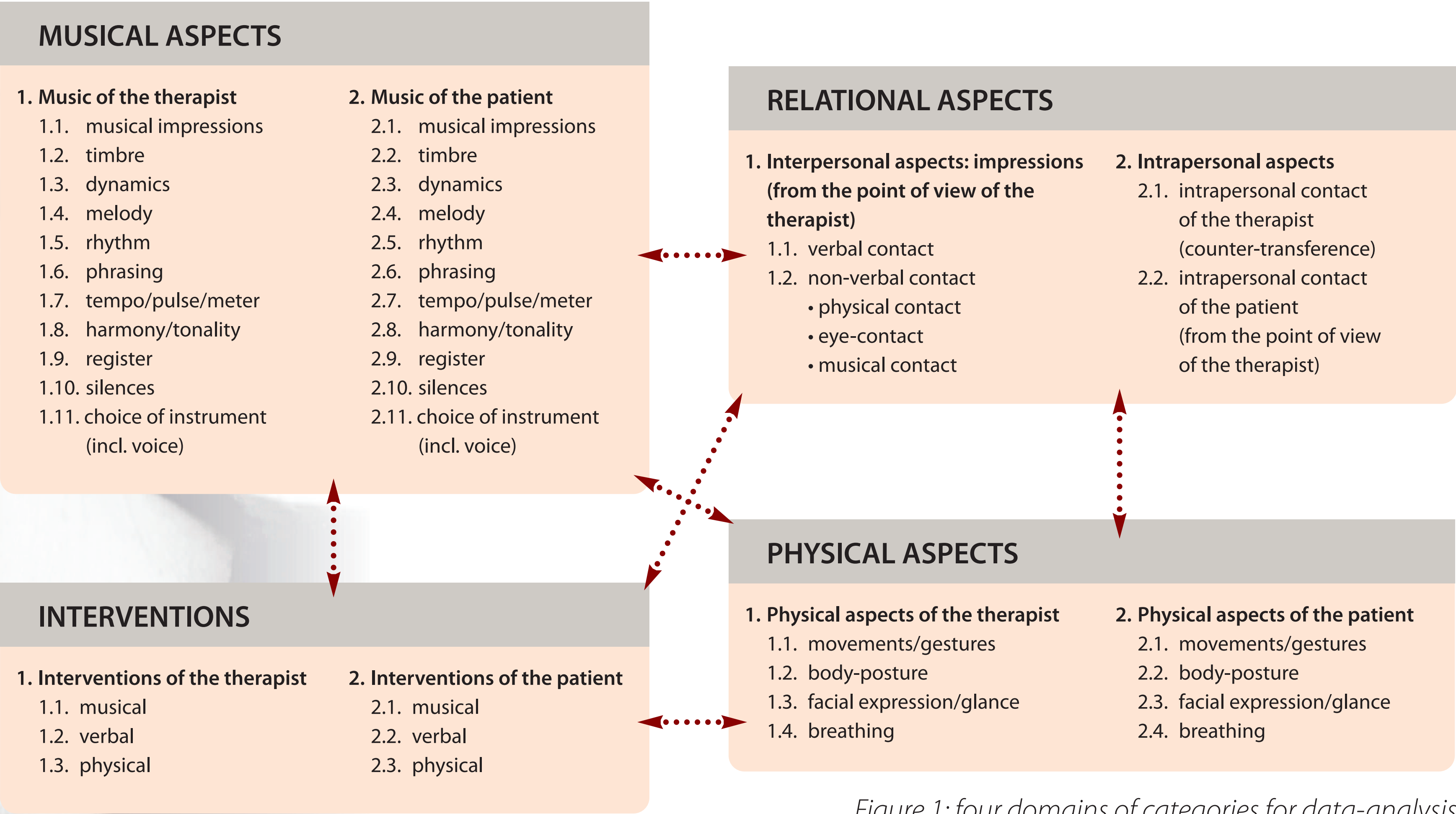


Figure 1: four domains of categories for data-analysis